

Remarks to the Energy and Technology Committee Public Hearing, re: Green Collar Jobs Initiative in Governor Rell's Global Climate Change bill (SB 23)

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Submitted by:

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Good afternoon, and thank you for permitting me to address the Committee.

Google has a total of three pages devoted to an emerging word in the English lexicon, "Statrriotism." It is state patriotism, defined as: "the condition of honoring your region above the national entity." Considering Connecticut's leadership in the nation regarding sustainable technologies, I am honored to speak to you today in the spirit of that word.

My name is Nory Oakes and I am a proud teacher in the Connecticut Technical High School System. I am here as a private citizen, not in any official capacity, however I assure you that I have the blessing of the superintendent of our schools, Dr. Abigail Hughes, to address you today.

My purpose for speaking is to convince you of the need to not only fully fund Governor Rell's Green Collar Jobs Initiative for the Connecticut Technical High Schools, but to also consider what the implications are for her vision in terms of our needs as a State and what it will truly take to make her vision a viable reality.

The language in Governor Rell's Initiative reads:

"Skilled workers in the areas of efficiency, conservation and renewable technologies will be critical to the State's energy future. Therefore, the Governor is calling for the establishment of a 'Green Collar Jobs' program to be offered by the States Vocational Technical Schools. The program will train students in energy efficient building, construction and retrofit work for residential and commercial facilities in energy efficiency programs, renewable energy technologies and other sustainable climate change and environmental compliance strategies."

Indeed, Connecticut must ensure that her future architects, HVAC installers, electricians and home builders are fully prepared for the expansion of green technologies in the State, and are familiar with existing and upcoming environmental standards. This will ultimately require more than seed money.

First of all, let me remind you of the urgency of our current situation regarding climate change and its implications for us as a State. Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, Gina McCarthy has made this clear. Let me quote an excerpt from a letter she recently published in the *Fairfield Citizen News*, responding to the Governor's State of the State address:

“...[W]e...have to be mindful that our environment is changing and could be altered dramatically over our lifetime if we do not take action immediately...”

As I see it, the Commissioner believes that the time for action is now and the pace for change must be stepped up accordingly. The Commissioner continues: “Under the governor's leadership, Connecticut is recognized as a national pacesetter in confronting the challenge of climate change and the related issue of energy conservation.”²

In addition to that, I'd like to read you the mission of the Connecticut Technical High School System for its students, which is:

“To provide a unique and rigorous high school learning environment that:

- ensures both student academic success, and trade/technology mastery and instills a zest for lifelong learning;
- prepares students for post-secondary education, including apprenticeships, and immediate productive employment; and
- responds to employers' and industries' *current and emerging and changing global workforce needs and expectations* through business/school partnerships.”

In order to fulfill this mission at the present time, it is imperative that the Governor's initiative for the technical schools be fully funded, and indeed, expanded upon as soon as possible. Let me explain why. Connecticut is rapidly shifting away from sole reliance on conventional technologies. According to Peter Longo, President and Executive Director for Connecticut Innovations, a bond package recently passed in the Connecticut General Assembly has greatly increased our State's economic competitiveness in green technologies. I quote him: “The bonding decision supports the message that we are trying to send to technology entrepreneurs here and abroad that Connecticut is *the* place to be for emerging technology companies.” Mr. Longo notes that Connecticut Innovations in 2007 alone has invested more than \$13 million in 18 technology companies, fifteen of them new to their portfolio, and has attracted seven companies to Connecticut from other states and from overseas.³

This in itself represents a remarkable challenge to the technical schools to meet these emerging needs. The current focus in the technical school curriculum is on conventional technologies, which, until recently, has met the needs of most contractors. This must change, and change quickly, however. Trade instructors in the technical schools have noted that many contractors are ill informed of issues concerning energy efficiency, and are not themselves sufficiently educated regarding new and emerging energy efficiency standards. We must shift the focus away from the same old, tired conventional technologies that are unsustainable, both in terms of climate and economy, and toward educating a new generation of “Green Collar” students and workers to fill the emerging need of Connecticut's rapidly expanding green sector. In order to serve the public's greatest good, our technical school students must be trained in the latest technologies and have a familiarity with all sustainable options, including solar, photovoltaics, wind power, biomass,

biofuels, and geothermal, so that we can all be equipped to deal with an uncertain energy future in confidence, knowing that we did our best for future generations.

I'd like to close by relating a personal story. A week or so ago, following a pep-talk I had with my students in which I let them know of their significance to the future of Connecticut as green collar workers and entrepreneurs, one of them looked over at the Eastern Connecticut State University campus from my classroom window.

"Are those solar panels?" he asked, wistfully, looking over at the university's laudable new green buildings across the way. For me, that question is heartbreaking. How could this student not know what solar panels look like? Another student of mine, with an enduring interest in wind power, confessed to me last week that he'd only "seen a windmill once," and that from a distance. At such a crucial juncture in Connecticut's history, how can we justify these remarks from technical school students? To borrow a plank from the Green Party, of which Windham's First Selectman, Jean de Smet is a proud representative, our new technologies, and fiscal policies must be "responsible to future generations who will inherit the results of our actions."

And it is because of that sentiment that I am here with you assembled today on the edge of fear and hope. Fear may be a great taskmaster, but it is not in our greatest good to let that motivate us to act. Instead, I believe we can put our faith in the strides Connecticut has already taken with regard to facing an uncertain climate future and be proud of the governor's steps to include the technical schools in combating the challenges ahead. I urge you to support the Governor's initiative without reservation.

Thank you.

Notes:

1. *Fairfield Citizen News*, February 15, 2008
http://www.fairfieldcitizen-news.com/letters/ci_8272039
2. *Fairfield Citizen News*, February 15, 2008
3. "Technology Today" January 2008 edition.
<http://www.ctinnovations.com/enews/CIjan08/CIjan08.htm#1>

